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ABSTRACT

Measured were attitudes toward handicapped children of 387 regular classroom teachers, and compared was knowledge of program placements for handicapped children held by 29 regular school administrative personnel in Canada and 35 special education "experts" from the U.S. The administrators and teachers completed The Rucker-Gable Educational Programming Scale (RGEPS) which provides knowledge and attitude scores based on a comparison with the 35 RGEPS "experts". Results indicated that the elementary level teachers were more positive in attitude than the RGEPS experts or secondary teachers. In addition, the school administrators selected placement options closer to the regular class than did the expert group. Results had implications for the mainstreaming of handicapped children in Canada. (CL)

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Placement of Handicapped Children by Canadian Mainstream Administrators and Teachers: A Rucker-Gable Survey

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The placement of handicapped children and the provision of appropriate services has been a continuing concern of Canadian special and regular educators in much the same way as in the United States (Hardy, McLeod, Minto, Perkins, and Quance, 1971). Controversy surrounds the use of self contained, special class settings similar to that found in the States (Goldstein, Moss, and Jordan, 1965; Dunn, 1968; Lilly, 1970; Vacc, 1973). In response to the various questions related to the efficacy and legality of special class placement, many Canadian school systems are attempting to follow such service delivery plans as the continuum of services advocated by Deno (1970). Specialized instructional programs have been developed in Canadian schools under titles such as "resource rooms" and "crisis teacher" as a means whereby the needs of atypical children may be met in a less restrictive environment. Thus the relationship between general and special education has become more critical to the education of exceptional children. Increasingly, general and special educators must interact in order to provide suitable educational programming for exceptional children in or near the mainstream.

It has been suggested that successful mainstream programming for handicapped children may be influenced by knowledge about appropriate educational placement and by attitudes educators retain toward handicapped children (Rucker and Gable, 1974). This study used the Rucker-Gable Educational Programming Scale (1974) to compare 1) the knowledge of program placements for handicapped children held by 29 regular school administrative personnel in a Winnipeg school district with the mean placement choices of 35 special education experts from the United States, and 2) the attitudes toward handicapped children of 387 regular classroom teachers in the same district with those of these 35 experts. The school personnel were from

24 schools--18 elementary and 5 secondary schools, and the sample constitutes 77% of the professional staff in one superintendency area. The participants were volunteers and were surveyed anonymously. The Rucker-Gable referent expert group is comprised of 35 university faculty members in special education who are generally regarded as having expertise as educators of special education teachers.

Comparisons between the Winnipeg sample and the RGEPS experts was important for a variety of reasons:

1. Useful information would be available on the readiness of a district to engage in effective program planning as mainstream education for the handicapped becomes popular educational practice.
2. No faculty position is designated as overall special education director in this district. Local schools are vested with the responsibility of program development and placement decisions. Building level staff must, therefore, rely largely upon their own source of knowledge and expertise in making decisions.
3. As a transition occurs from the traditional self-contained service delivery system to more flexible mainstream oriented options, the knowledge of appropriate placements held by administrators and the attitudes toward handicapped children held by regular educators may be crucial variables related to the success of such programs.

The Rucker-Gable Educational Programming Scale (RGEPS)

The Rucker-Gable Educational Programming Scale (RGEPS) is an instrument containing brief behavioral descriptions of 30 children actually referred for special education services and a description of a 7 step

continuum of special education placement ranging from regular class placement with no support services to placement outside public education. Table 1 illustrates how each successive level on this continuum represents an increase in the amount of support services required by a regular class teacher to maintain a child in the regular classroom or a reduction in the amount of contact time the child has with the regular class teacher and peers.

Both knowledge and attitude scores are derived by comparing the respondents' placement choice for each child with the mean placement choice of the RGEPS experts. Knowledge scores are obtained by computing the difference between the respondents' placement choice for each item and the average placement choice of the 35 experts. A total knowledge score is obtained as well as 6 subscores, which are the three disability areas of mental retardation (MR), emotional disturbance (ED), and learning disabilities (LD) and the degree of disability: mild, moderate, or severe disability. Attitude scores are obtained by calculating directly from the individual's score on each item. A total attitude score is obtained as well as 6 subscores for mental retardation (MR), emotional disturbance (ED), learning disabilities (LD), mild handicaps, moderate handicaps, and severe handicaps. In this study, knowledge scores were derived for administrators and attitude scores for regular class teachers.

Interpretation of Scores:

With the RGEPS, attitude is believed to be the amount of social distance that a teacher wishes to maintain between himself and the handicapped child. Thus, the higher the attitude score, the more positive in attitude is the teacher toward maintaining the handicapped child in an instructional program close to him--in the mainstream. On the other hand, this scale

suggests that the higher the administrator knowledge score the greater is the discrepancy between the knowledge held by administrators and the expert group. A lower knowledge score, therefore, means greater agreement with the experts in terms of which special education placement options to use, and indicates a comparable knowledge base from which the administrators operate.

RESULTS

Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures were one-way, fixed effects analyses of variance for multiple group comparisons and t-test comparisons between two groups. Descriptive data is also presented.

Teacher Attitudes

No significant differences were found between the mean attitude scores for all the regular class teachers and the experts, either on the total attitude score or any of the 6 subscores. Figures 1 and 2 are profiles contrasting the regular class teachers' attitude scores with the RGEPS expert scores.

However, significant differences in attitude scores were found between secondary school teachers, elementary school teachers, and the experts for the total attitude score and all subscores excepting the learning disabilities (LD) category. Figures 3 and 4 are profiles illustrating the differences in placement, and therefore attitudes, between the three groups. Elementary teachers tended to place handicapped children in instructional programs closer to the mainstream than did either the secondary school teachers or the experts ($F = 9.69$, $p < .005$). Specifically, elementary school teachers were more positive in attitude toward moderately

and severely handicapped children (F = 6.07 and 6.72, $p < .05$, respectively), and toward mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed youngsters (F = 11.07, $p < .005$, and F = 6.52, $p < .05$, respectively). Secondary school teachers were significantly less positive in attitude toward mildly handicapped children than the experts (F = 9.69, $p < .005$), placing them further away from regular education. Table 2 summarizes the mean attitude ratings, standard deviations, and ANOVA statistics for the elementary, secondary, and expert groups.

Administrator Knowledge

Comparisons between the knowledge scores of the school administrators and the referent expert group found significant differences in ratings for placement of children with mild, moderate, and severe handicaps and of children termed mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, and learning disabled as well as for total knowledge. Figures 5 and 6 indicate that administrators' placements generally were in instructional options closer to the mainstream than those of the referent expert groups. Since knowledge is determined by analyzing discrepancies between sample and expert group ratings it is important to note the consistent direction of the differences between administrators and experts. Furthermore, these differences do not indicate "better" or "worse" knowledge per se. Table 3 contains a summary of means, standard deviations, and t-scores for school administrators and experts.

DISCUSSION

In summary, the results indicate that elementary school regular class teachers were more positive in attitude toward many handicapped children than were the RGEPS experts or secondary school regular class teachers.

Furthermore, school administrators as a total group chose placement options closer to the regular education program than did the expert group, indicating substantial discrepancies between what the administrators saw as viable placement choices for handicapped children and what the experts hold as appropriate educational placements for handicapped children.

It seems reasonable to conclude that this group of elementary school teachers are more willing to have handicapped children in or near the mainstream than either the experts or the secondary school teachers. This is especially the case for moderately and severely handicapped children and the mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed. It may also be important to make distinctions between groups of regular class teachers since elementary school teachers were more positive in attitude than experts, and since secondary school teachers held attitudes comparable to those of the experts.

The discrepancies that existed between the knowledge scores of administrators and experts indicate that the school administrators possessed either "different" or "less" knowledge of appropriate placements for handicapped children than do the experts. These results can be viewed as a display of optimism that avoids "realistic" choices of placement. However, these authors suggest that caution is advised in the interpretations of experts' attitude and knowledge scores. Expert ratings were collected 4-5 years ago when an impetus toward realistic mainstream programs was in its early stages. Programshave since been reported (Deno, 1972) that claim effectiveness in mainstream or resource room placements for children. Workshops, legal decisions, and public school policy statements that emphasize mainstreaming have been made available to school personnel. Furthermore, administrators may have been influenced by Canadian legislation now in progress that would mandate the putting into practice of the principle of

the "least restrictive alternative" in school placements. It is probable that both expert and public school personnel judgement have become increasingly more positive toward the placement of handicapped children in mainstream programs.

Implications

At present, school districts in Canada are being either encouraged or legislatively mandated into accepting mainstreaming as a primary context for educating handicapped children. The traditional disparity in philosophy and pedagogy between special and regular education leaves a gap that needs to be bridged if any relevant amalgamation of educational practices is to occur. It therefore seems necessary that school districts examine carefully: 1) the readiness and willingness of school personnel to accept the basic principles of mainstreaming, and 2) their ability to undertake such modifications in programming as mainstreaming demands.

Basically, this survey suggests the existence of two conditions among school personnel of this district that could impact upon successful implementation of mainstream programms: 1) the overall positive attitude of elementary school teachers to handicapped children as well as the relatively positive attitude of secondary school teachers, and 2) the discrepancy between the knowledge held by regular school administrators and that held by experts in the field of special education.

Bearing in mind that teacher attitudes can significantly influence the social and academic progress of children, one of the most important basics for successful implementation of mainstream programs is present, since teacher attitudes among the subjects of this study are positive. Assuming that support services are adequate and available, and that placement in programs are appropriate, it is possible that the positive attitudes of

regular classroom teachers can be maintained, with related benefits accruing to their handicapped students.

Furthermore, while "ideal" conditions for placement of handicapped children may not yet exist in this public school system, administrators of regular programs seem to have a positive sense of what is appropriate for many handicapped children, given further development and interfacing of special and regular education. While it is not totally clear, it is possible that administrative knowledge was in general agreement with the attitudes of the teachers whom they supervise.

To the extent that this school district is successful in reducing the discrepancy in philosophy and pedagogy between special and regular education, programs oriented toward mainstreaming hold potential for success. To the extent that general school administrators and teachers may aid in the implementation of mainstream programs, it seems that they will be helpful in achieving the objectives of mainstreaming: The appropriate education in the appropriate instructional environment for handicapped children.

TABLE 1

Continuum of Placements
for Respondents to RGEPS

Value	Placement	Description
7	Regular Classroom	No basic change in teaching procedures.
6	Consultation	Regular classroom placement with specialists available for consultation with teacher (or parent) whenever needed.
5	Consultation and Direct Services	Regular classroom placement with specialists available in the school to consult with teacher and provide short-term direct services to student.
4	Resource Room	Regular classroom placement with resource room services (special education teacher providing supplemental instruction) provided on a continuing basis in which the student can participate for as much as two hours each day.
3	Part-time Special Class	Student enrolled in a special class for the majority of each day, but enters regular classroom for certain subjects.
2	Full-time Special Class	Student assigned to a self-contained special class on a full-time basis.
1	NOT	Student placed in a residential school, hospital program, treatment center, etc. because he or she cannot reasonably be handled within the context of regular or special public education.

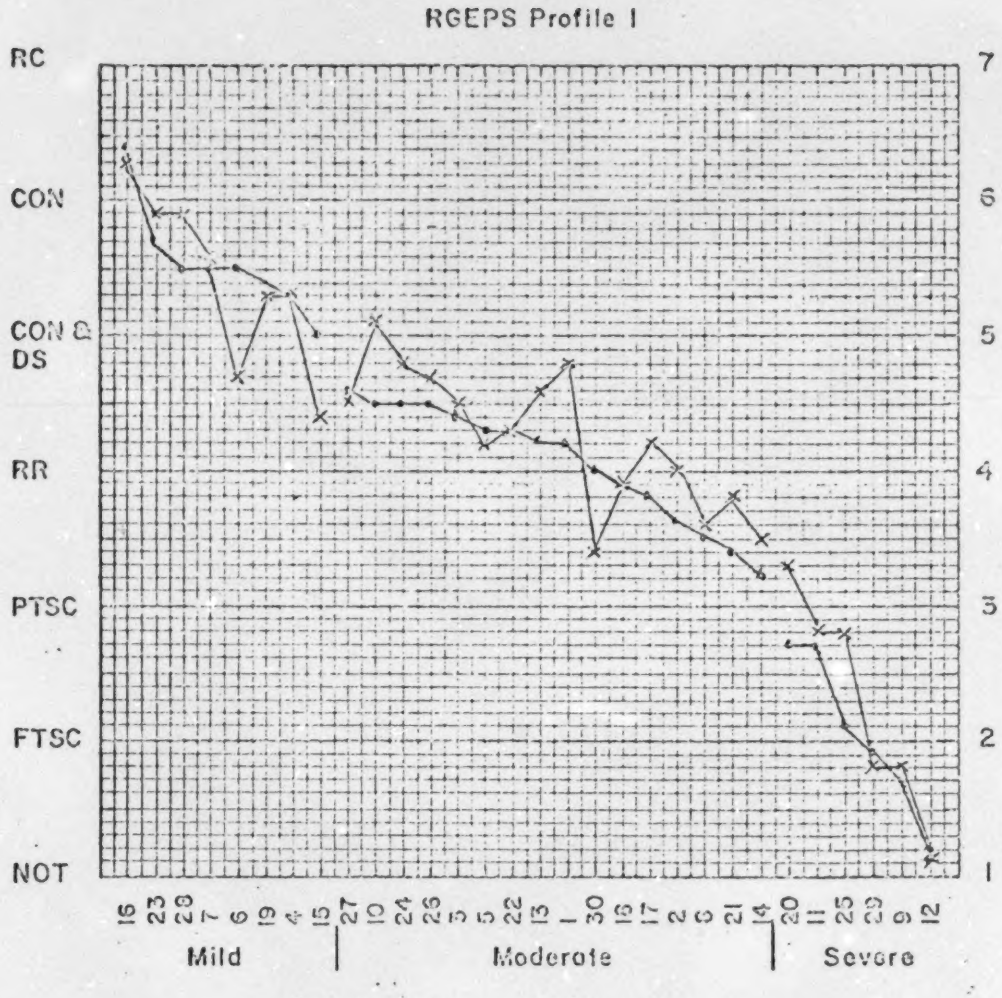

FIGURE 1. Profile of Regular Class Teachers Placement Choices Compared with RGEPS Experts for Categories: Mild, Moderate, Severe.

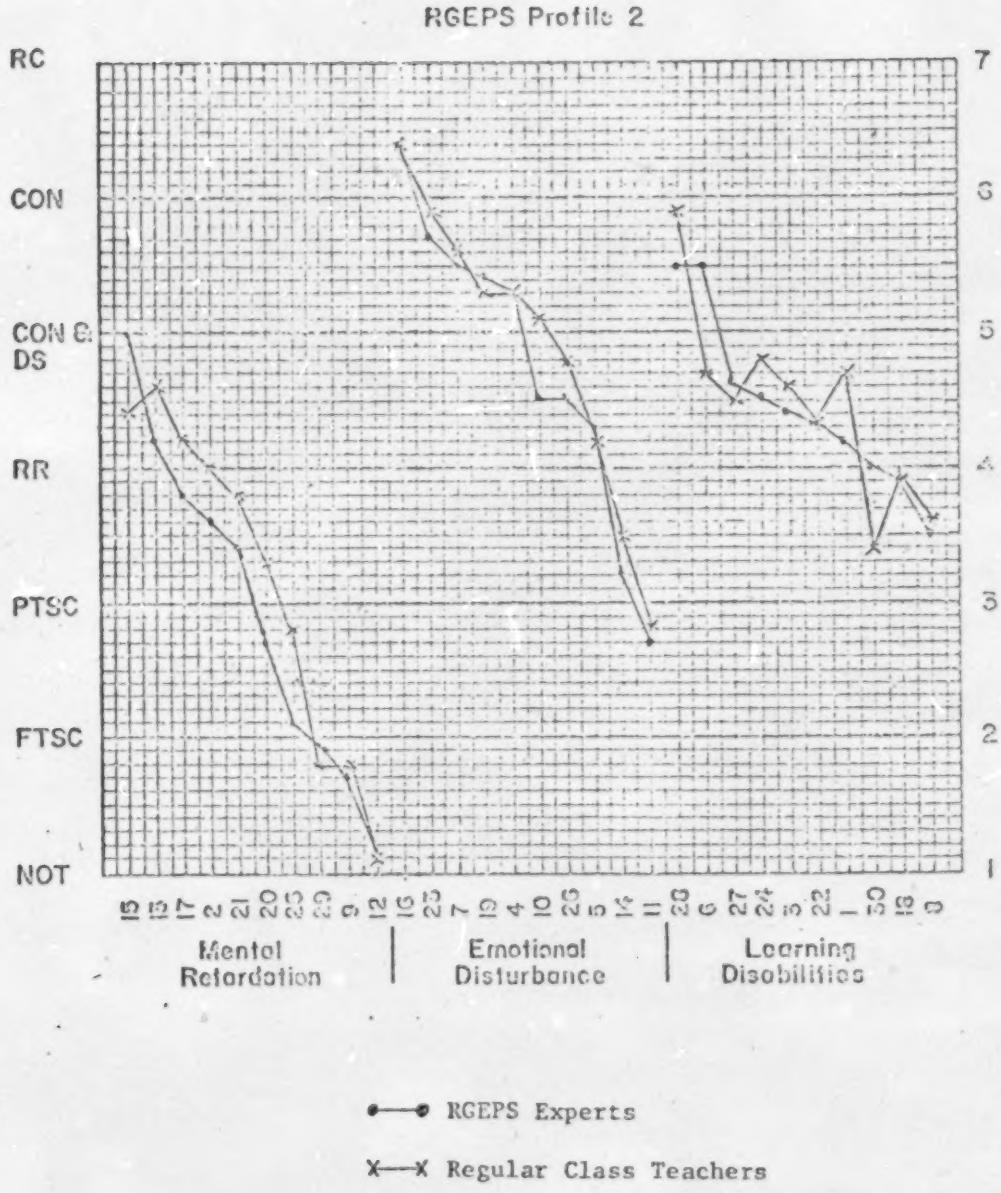

FIGURE 2. Profile of Total Regular Class Teachers Placement Choices Compared with RGEPS Experts for Categories: MR, ED, LD.

Table 2

Summary of Mean Attitude Ratings, Standard Deviations, and ANOVA Statistics for Elementary School Teachers, Secondary School Teachers, and RGEPS Experts.

Category	Means			Standard Deviations			Analysis of Variance		
	Elementary Teachers	Secondary Teachers	Experts	Elementary Teachers	Secondary Teachers	Experts	df	F Score	Significance
Total	128.59 (N=208)	121.05 (N=177)	121.54 (N=35)	18.39	17.41	9.52	2/419	9.69	p <.005
Mild	44.64 (N=208)	42.19 (N=177)	44.20 (N=35)	5.56	5.76	3.79	2/419	9.69	p <.005
Moderate	69.34 (N=207)	65.99 (N=177)	65.14 (N=35)	10.61	10.47	6.57	2/417	6.07	p <.05
Severe	14.31 (N=208)	12.86 (N=177)	12.20 (N=35)	4.81	4.37	2.27	2/419	6.72	p <.05
MR	33.37 (N=208)	30.17 (N=177)	29.60 (N=35)	7.32	7.55	3.75	2/419	11.071	p <.005
ED	49.91 (N=208)	47.20 (N=177)	47.46 (N=35)	7.87	7.68	5.16	2/419	6.52	p <.05
LD	45.31 (N=208)	43.67 (N=177)	44.48	6.47	6.27	4.01	2/419		n.s.

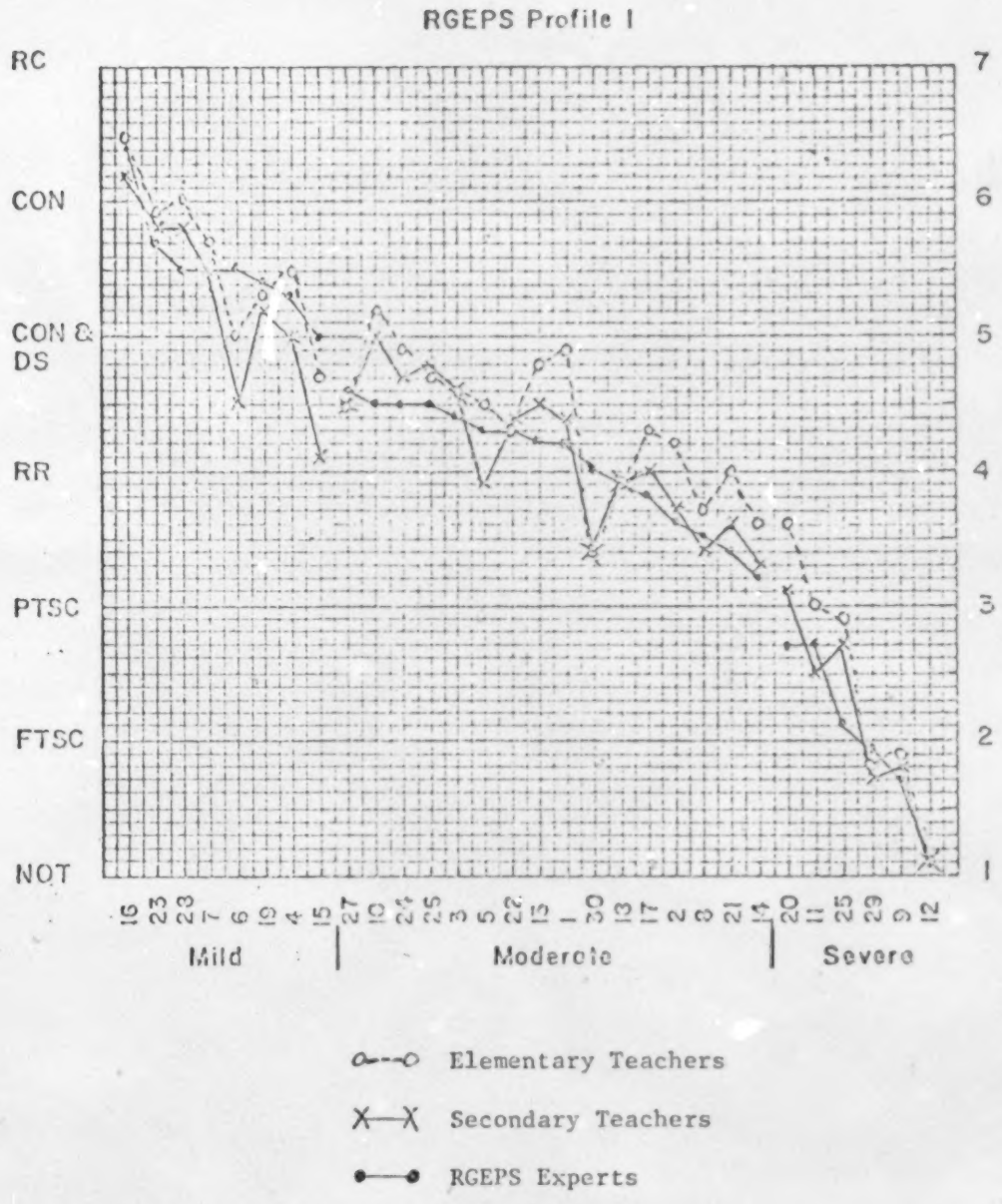

FIGURE 3. Profile of Elementary Teachers, Secondary Teachers and RGEPS Experts for Categories: Mild, Moderate, Severe.

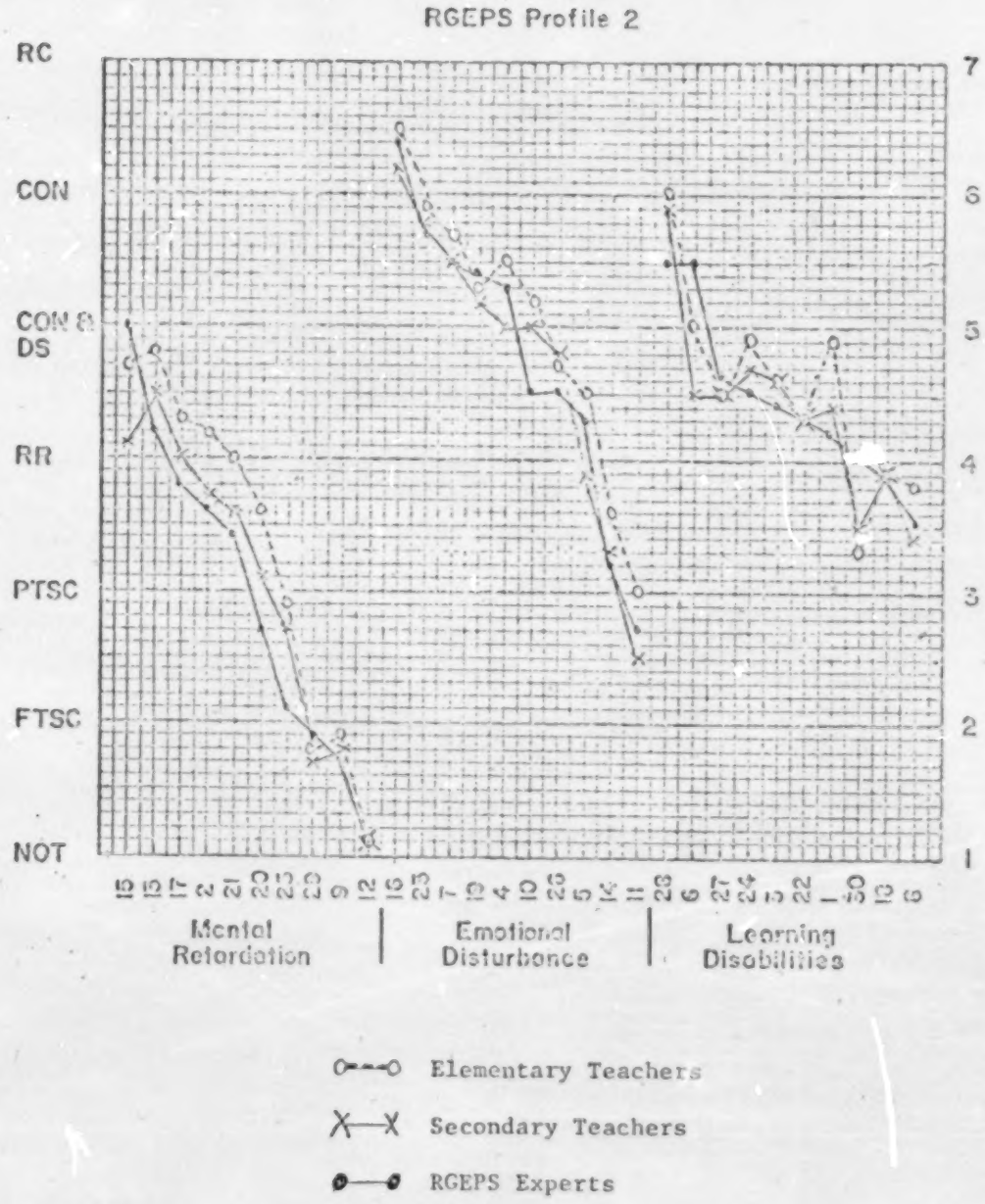

FIGURE 4. Profile of Elementary Teachers, Secondary Teachers and RGEPS Experts for Categories: MR, ED, LD.

Table 3

Summary of Mean Knowledge Scores, Standard Deviations and t Statistics for Administrators and RGEPS Experts.

Category	Means		Standard Deviations		t-Test		
	Administrators	Experts	Administrators	Experts	df	t Score	Significance
Total	7.37 (N=29)	4.82 (N=35)	1.82	.93	62	7.211	p <.001
Mild	3.11 (N=29)	2.56 (N=35)	.86	.63	62	2.916	p <.005
Moderate	5.50 (N=29)	3.61 (N=35)	1.35	.86	62	6.782	p <.001
Severe	3.60 (N=29)	1.67 (N=35)	1.58	.72	62	6.483	p <.001
MR	4.67 (N=29)	2.73 (N=35)	1.73	.68	62	6.098	p <.001
ED	4.27 (N=29)	2.86 (N=35)	1.01	.86	62	6.009	p <.001
LD	3.53 (N=29)	2.57 (N=35)	1.10	.80	62	4.020	p <.001

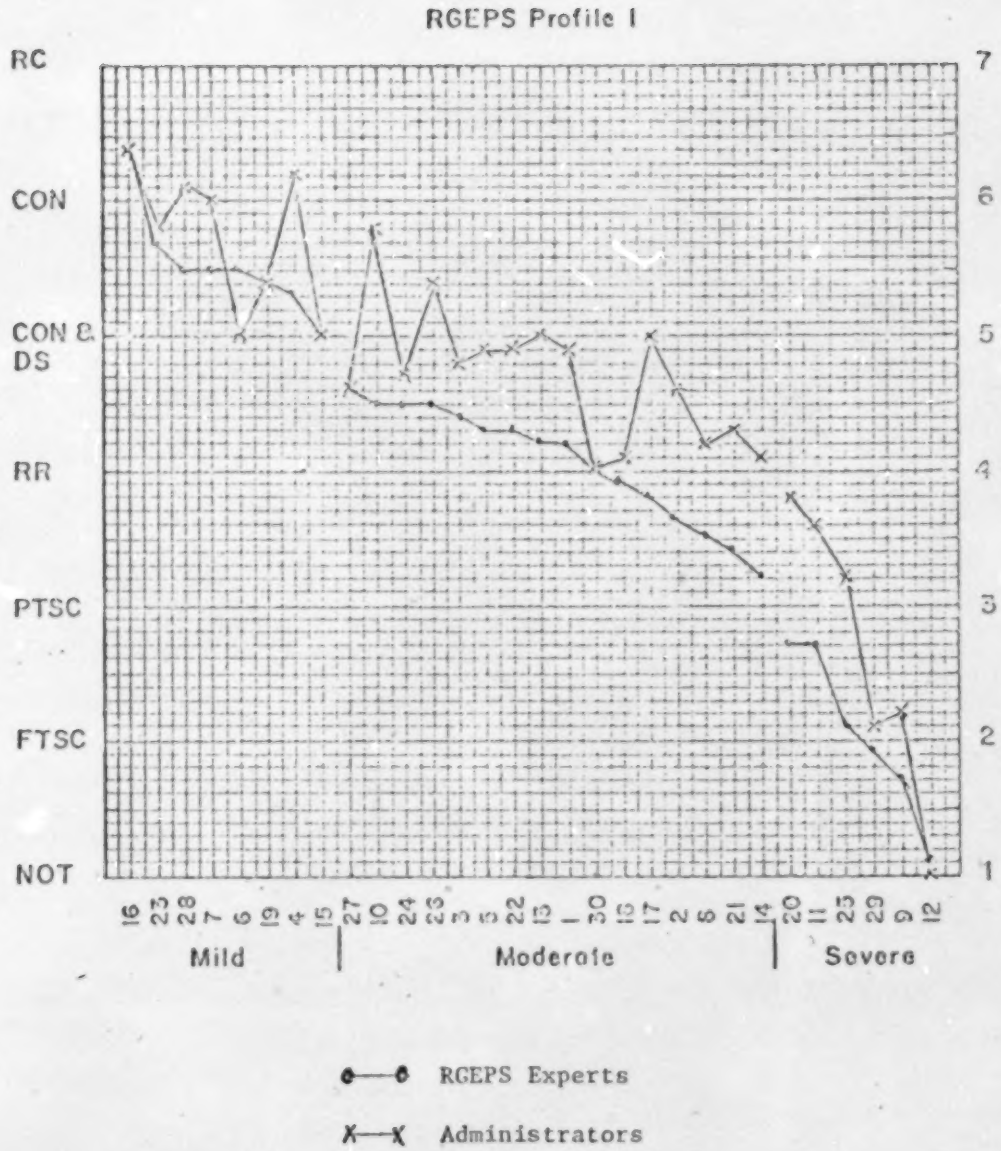

FIGURE 5. Profile for Administrators' Placement Choices Compared with RGEPS Experts for Categories: Mild, Moderate, Severe.

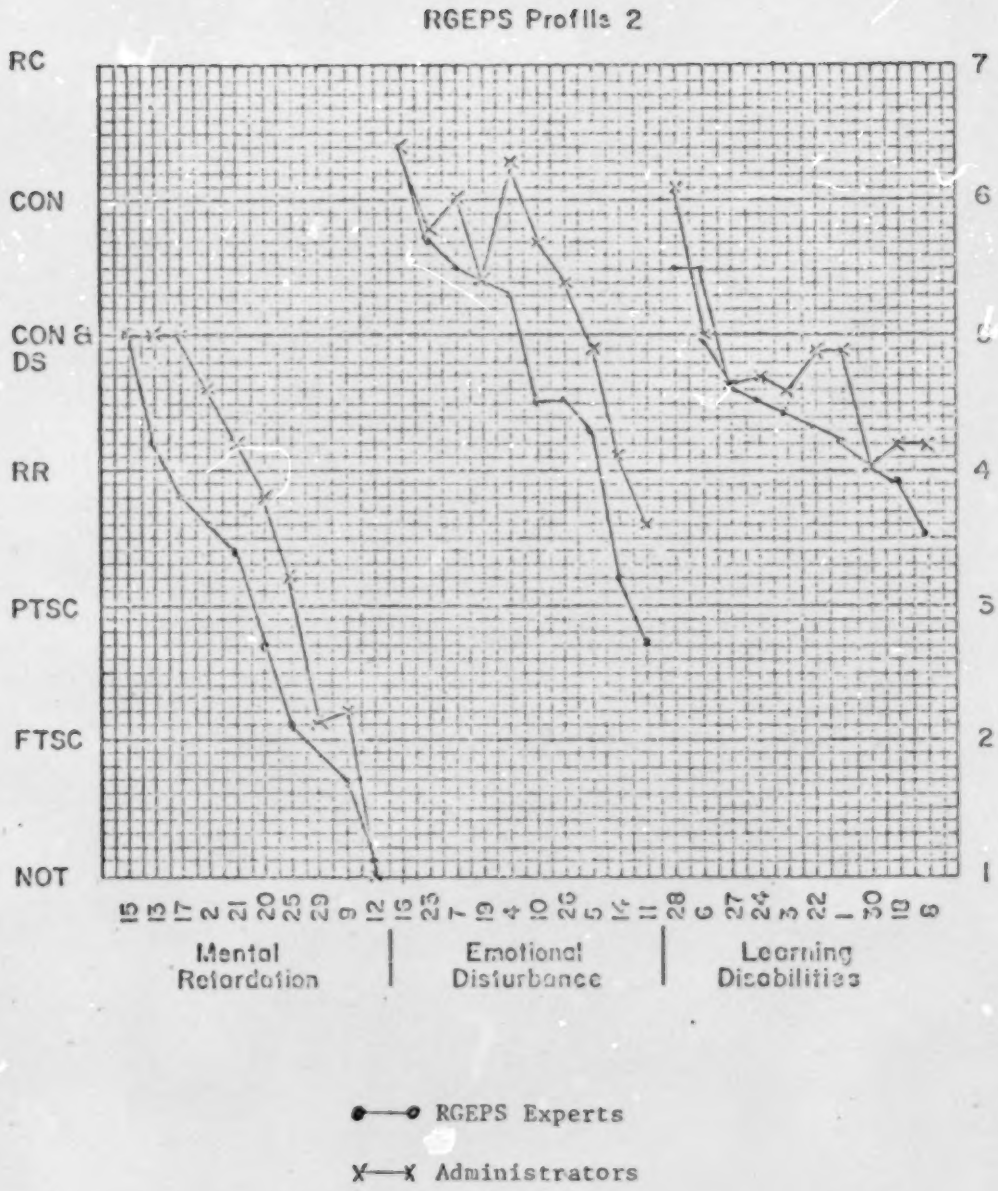

FIGURE 6. Profile for Administrators' Placement Choices Compared with RGEPS Experts for Categories: MR, ED, LD.